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S E C R E T SECTION 01 OF 03 ABUJA 001018

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SUBJECT: (C/NF) NIGERIA: NORTHERN SUPPORT FOR YAR'ADUA
WANING, THOUGH TEMPERED BY FEAR

REF: A. 07 ABUJA 2616

[1](#)B. 07 ABUJA 47

[1](#)C. ABUJA 799

[1](#)D. 07 ABUJA 1671

[1](#)E. ABUJA 643

Classified By: A/Pol/C Heather Merritt, reasons 1.4 (b, c & d).

[1](#)1. (S//NF) SUMMARY: Maitama Sule (strictly protect), former Nigerian ambassador to the United Nations (1979-1983) and confidant of President Umaru Yar'Adua, averred that the northern political elite is increasingly apprehensive about Yar'Adua's health and his capacity to continue to govern, and is fearful the North may lose the presidency to the South if Yar'Adua dies, although we note that there are other factors at play on this issue besides Yar'Adua's health, particularly if the Supreme Court calls for a new election. While Sule believes that President's performance during his first year in office has suffered due to his ailing health, he assessed Yar'Adua has succeeded in disentangling and distancing himself from former President Obasanjo. Sule informed that Yar'Adua wants to further reduce Obasanjo's influence both within the Villa and the National Assembly. Consequently, Sule remarked, Yar'Adua intends to replace current Chief of Staff, and Obasanjo-loyalist, Abdullahi Mohammed. (Nigerian press reported May 30 that Mohammed has resigned, and will officially vacate office June 2.) Sule confided that some influential northerners are currently pressuring former National Security Adviser, Aliyu Muhammad Gusau, to consider taking over as Chief of Staff. Also, Sule alleged that Obasanjo is working to bribe the Supreme Court to overturn President Yar'Adua's April 2007 election. While claiming that First Lady Turai Yar'Adua is heavily involved in corrupt activities, Sule insisted that President Yar'Adua is committed to remaining personally untainted by corruption. To that end, Sule asserted, President Yar'Adua recently turned down \$60 million, which had been offered to him as the President's personal "share" of Nigeria's monthly oil earnings. Although Yar'Adua, according to Sule, allegedly ordered his "share" to be deposited into the nation's treasury, Sule also said First Lady Turai pocketed \$60 million while Senate President David Mark and House Speaker Dimeji Bankole each pocketed \$30 million. We still contend however, that it is impossible for Yar'Adua not to know about his wife's illicit activity even if he is not personally accepting bribes or engaging in such activity. END SUMMARY.

[1](#)2. (S//NF) Maitama Sule (strictly protect), former Nigerian ambassador to the United Nations (1979-1983) and well-known

confidant of President Umaru Yar'Adua spoke with PolOff at his Kano residence May 15 (see Ref A for Sule biographical information). Sule lamented the northern political elite remains increasingly apprehensive about Yar'Adua's health. Whereas earlier health-related predictions of Yar'Adua's prognosis had been relatively positive, current estimates, Sule observed, paint a somber picture of the President's strength, and consequently, his capacity to continue to govern. With the prospect of Yar'Adua's death while still in office figuring prominently in the minds of many in the North, Sule remarked that the North fears it may inadvertently forfeit its turn to hold the presidency. Such an eventuality, Sule bemoaned, would impair the North's ability to retain influence and help chart a more positive course for northerners, especially after eight years of what northerners deem Obasanjo's injurious influence on the North.

13. (S//NF) Sule believes that Yar'Adua has succeeded in distancing himself from Obasanjo, and appears more committed to attenuating Obasanjo's influence within the Villa. To that end, Sule said, Yar'Adua plans to reshuffle the cabinet to replace Obasanjo-loyalists within the Villa. In particular, Sule noted that the northern political elite is working to convince former National Security Adviser Aliyu Muhammad Gusau to rebuff entreaties by Ibrahim Babangida to aid him in a return to power, and instead, accede to the position of Yar'Adua's Chief of Staff, which is currently held by Obasanjo-loyalist Abdullahi Mohammed. (Nigerian press reported May 30 that Mohammed resigned with effect from June 2. Gbolade Osinowo, Senior Special Assistant to President Yar'Adua will act as Chief of Staff until a

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replacement is announced.) Sule said that Gusau has been reluctant to accept anything less than the presidency, given that he too wanted to be the People's Democratic Party (PDP) candidate in the April 2007 presidential elections (Ref B). Sule admitted that Obasanjo's influence within the PDP has not been as circumscribed as Yar'Adua had hoped. However, by limiting Chief of Staff Mohammed's (and potentially, other Obasanjo-loyalists') access to the President, Sule argued, Obasanjo would be left in the dark since he would neither be able to influence Yar'Adua nor be privy to the ins and outs of the Villa. Sule reasoned, as well, that a powerful Chief of Staff loyal to Yar'Adua would ensure not only that Obasanjo's power within the Villa would be diminished, but also that the influence of the ambitious (though certainly not tied to Obasanjo) Secretary to the Government Babagana Kingibe would be reduced.

14. (S//NF) Sule also intimated that Obasanjo, in concert with Senate President David Mark, is working to bribe the Supreme Court to overturn President Yar'Adua's April 2007 election (see Ref C). (In the event that the Supreme Court annuls the President's election, the Constitution stipulates that the Senate President administers an interim government for a period of up to 90 days pending fresh elections. However, Mark has his own political troubles as his election too had been overturned in late February 2008.) Moreover, Sule stated that in his judgment, the President's lackluster performance over this past year should be viewed in light of his ailing health. Despite his shortcomings, Sule said, some of the northern elite continue to politically support Yar'Adua not least because he is viewed as committed to preserving northern interests.

15. (S//NF) While claiming that First Lady Turai Yar'Adua is heavily involved in corrupt practices, and especially real estate fraud, Sule insisted that President Yar'Adua is committed to remaining personally untainted by corruption. To that end, Sule asserted, President Yar'Adua recently turned down approximately \$60 million, which had been offered to him by the Nigerian National Petroleum Corporation (NNPC) as the President's personal "share" of Nigeria's monthly oil earnings (Nigeria has produced around 2 million bpd, though production has dropped recently to 1.8 million bpd).

Allegedly, Sule said, the NNPC (beginning under former President Obasanjo's administration) allocated USD 1.00 per barrel of Nigerian oil sold as a type of personal payment or "kickback" to the President. While Yar'Adua reportedly ordered his "share" to be deposited into the nation's treasury, Sule claimed that the First Lady pocketed her husband's reported share, while Senate President David Mark and House Speaker Dimeji Bankole pocketed USD 0.50/barrel (e.g., \$30 million). In light of the possibility that Obasanjo could have stolen billions of dollars under this arrangement, Sule told PolOff that Yar'Adua told him that he may use this information, perhaps one day in the near future, to indict Obasanjo for corruption. The problem however, according to Sule, rested in the fact that Yar'Adua recognized that if he were to pursue Obasanjo, he may unwittingly subject his wife and close advisers to greater scrutiny, and risk his own political survival.

16. (S//NF) Sule said that Yar'Adua had effectively quashed efforts by Obasanjo to direct Senate President David Mark, et al. to inflate allocation requests for the 2008 budget in order to funnel a substantial portion of those extra funds to Obasanjo (Ref E). Sule told PolOff that the various chairs of the budget committees in both the House of Representatives and Senate were Obasanjo-loyalists. The disagreements between the National Assembly (NASS) and President Yar'Adua over the passage of the budget resulted from Yar'Adua's desire to limit Obasanjo's influence over the NASS, and to assert his own authority, Sule opined. Furthermore, Sule said the Senate and House had unsuccessfully attempted to extort money from the Presidency in order to pass the budget.

17. (C//NF) Retired Major General, and current chair of the northern interest group the Arewa Consultative Forum, Ibrahim Haruna (strictly protect) told PolOff May 29 that although President Yar'Adua is a fellow northerner, he has been a "disaster" for Nigeria since his inauguration May 2007.

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Haruna opined that Yar'Adua, in one year, has not delivered on any of the promises he had made to the North. To the contrary, Haruna asserted, Yar'Adua has been "reaping the rewards" of the presidency without having to "lift a finger." Haruna alleged that Yar'Adua has demonstrated during his first year in office that he is more interested in "owning oil wells" in the Delta than in conducting Nigeria's political affairs.

AN ANALYSIS

18. (S//NF) We believe Sule's assessment that Yar'Adua is successfully (albeit slowly) disengaging himself from Obasanjo is valid, and his information on the First Lady's alleged illicit enrichment activities tracks with other reporting. However, Sule may be exaggerating the political support Yar'Adua has in the North. Or, at the least, Sule may be conflating the North's support for Yar'Adua with the North's desire to hold onto its turn for the presidency. Over the course of Yar'Adua's first year in office and slow pace of reform, northern elite opinions of the President seem to have gradually shifted (see also Ref D), as they worry not only about his health but also forfeiting the presidency to the South. While some have argued that Yar'Adua is committed to safeguarding northern interests, others have maintained that the President has proven to be both incapable and unwilling to do anything positive for the North (and the rest of Nigeria). Certainly, several northern contacts with whom we have spoken have said, time and again, that the North fears it may lose the helm of political affairs should President Yar'Adua die in office or fail to return as the PDP's candidate in any re-run of last year's presidential race (in the event the Supreme Court overturns his April 2007 election). After one year in office, many northerners consider Yar'Adua equally as complicit as Obasanjo in the North's underdevelopment, and accuse the President of turning

a blind eye to his own region. After all, one of the principal grievances of the North during Obasanjo's past administration was not simply that Obasanjo was from the South and ignored Northern interests, but that Obasanjo successfully thwarted efforts by the North to exert its relevance in his administration.

19. (S//NF) Additionally, many prominent northerners have spoken out against not only Obasanjo's mismanagement of the Nigerian government's vast resources, but also President Yar'Adua's unimpressive record of performance over this past year. It appears that the northern political elite's desire to retain the presidency is separate, to a degree, from its support for this particular northern president, or even for concerns that Yar'Adua may be ineffectual or corrupt. In the short term, desire for a Northern president may temper criticism for Yar'Adua in certain circles. However, with time, it is difficult to surmise how the desire for the North to retain the presidency can sustain support for Yar'Adua unless he begins to pick up the pace. END COMMENT.
SANDERS